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IN THE

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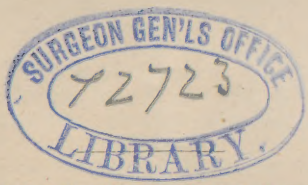
OF PHYSIC.

BY

E. SEGUIN, M.D.



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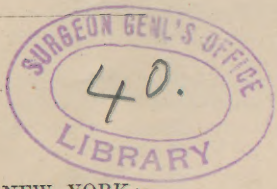

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INTERNATIONAL UNIFORMITY IN THE PRACTICE AND RECORDS OF PHYSIC.

By E. SEGUIN, M.D.

The first want of the members of an International Medical Congress is to understand one another; but we have not yet arrived at this ideal of internationalism. The unity of language founded upon the mother-tongue of Europe has been broken when it became evident that the Latin, instead of serving to propagate ideas, was used by the Congregation of the Index to spy their eclosion (hatching) and to burn them by the hand of the hangman. Fra Paolo hid his discovery of the valves of the veins, and its consequences, in the library of Padua for fear of the inquisition; Luther had to translate the Bible to cause it to be read; and Descartes lived in voluntary exile, and published his treatise on *The Method*, in French, in order to speak freely. So that the diversity of the languages we write since this revolution is as likely and as necessary to insure everywhere the freedom of thought, as to favor the complete expansion of individual and national geniuses.

However, one cannot fail to see that this diversity opposes a large obstacle to the interchange of ideas, even of feelings—a something similar to a veil spread at the frontiers to arrest them, and which prevents the fecundation which takes place by the natural process of distant pollenization.

This defect was first felt by the naturalists and chemists, who, already at the end of the seventeenth century, tried to create nomenclatures, symbols, and measures, in view of their common acceptance by all the nations. This uniformity, as well as the other one previously created for the mathematical language by our masters, the Arabs, permit us to read, almost without linguistic preparation, the books of chemistry, of physics, and of mathematics written in almost any language.

We would like to be able to say the same thing in medicine; but daily experience has taught all of us how difficult it is to read foreign observations, and even to compare ours with those of our fellow-citizens and near neighbors.

This anarchy, which seems the archeus of our profession, caused incalculable retardment in medical advancement, and has been the principal theme of the protestations, whose series forms a chain of which the present memorial is but the last link.

1832.—Louis, Andral, Chaumel, founded the *Société Médicale d'Observation*, whose main object was to influence the medical mind, to elevate it to the comprehension of the importance of observing all the morbid phenomena with precision, to report all the cases with mathematical exactness, to propagate and develop the *numerical method of observation* of Louis. If such men had been supplied with the instruments of positive diagnosis recently invented, the results of their efforts would not have remained limited to a small circle of devoted disciples.

1860.—The celebrated chemist, Dumas, demanded, in the preface of the French Codex, the *unification* of the codex of all the parts of the globe.

1865.—At the first Pharmaceutic Congress meeting at Brunswick, the question of the uniformity of medical preparations and doses filled several sittings; Danckwortt made on it a favorable report, which was supported by Robinet and Guibours, and unanimously accepted.

1867.—At the second Pharmaceutic Congress of Paris, where were present the delegates from seventeen nations, the question of establishing everywhere the uniformity of officinal preparations was then commended: "To study the means of composing a codex, or legal formulary, which could be accepted as universal for the officinal preparations whose uniformity in all civilized countries is most desirable."

The learned Mialhe made, upon the proposition, a report whose perspicuity is characterized in the following extract: "At a time when the means of communication between people become so easy, we feel for all the men stricken by the same diseases, and

suffering the same pains, the necessity of a uniformity of treatment, based upon the unity of pharmaceutic preparations in all civilized countries, so that a medical prescription could be identically executed in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, or in the United States, etc., with the same ease for the pharmaceutists and the same security for the patients."

Upon this report the Congress of 1867 decided, that: (1) A universal codex must be adopted. (2) It will be written in Latin. (3) The metric system will be used in it. (4) A special commission will be named *ad hoc*, and will begin immediately.

Not less important and more precise were the resolutions received from Spain before the closing of this Congress of Paris.

1867, *August* 21.—The College of Pharmacy of Madrid concluded a long discussion on the same subject, by the adoption of the following resolutions: (1) Realization of a universal pharmacopœia, which must be the result of the concourse of representatives of all the medical sciences, and keep in view the particular conditions of general health in the various countries. (2) The redaction of this universal pharmacopœia can be commenced immediately, with the assent and concourse of all the nations who feel an interest in its execution. (3) As soon as the principle will be admitted, it would be next in order to charge an international commission with the redaction of this code of pharmacy, and to cause the compound preparations to be reduced in their composition to their simplest elements.

1869.—The third International Pharmaceutic Congress met at Vienna, where the question of a universal codex came up again. The decisions of the former Congress were reaffirmed, and the Society of Pharmacy of Paris was intrusted with the work preparatory to the realization of the plan of a uniform pharmacopœia. The names of the commissaries testify of the importance attached to the work: Buignet, Lefort, Mialhe, Wurtz, Planchon, Junghfleisch, Roucher, Duquesnel, Guichard, Mayet, Méhu, Boudet, reporter. His report, delayed by the Franco-German war, was read,

1874, *July*—and the Society of Pharmacy of Paris

voted that it would serve as the preface to the project of the international codex.

1874, *August.*—At the International Pharmaceutic Congress of St. Petersburg twelve nations were represented, Boudet presented his report, and Méhu deposited the project of universal codex, elaborated by the Pharmaceutic Society of Paris. After three sittings given to a thorough discussion of this instrument, was voted the unfortunate proposition of asking the Russian Government to ask from the other Powers the nomination of commissions of inquiry, which would have capacity for modifying or accepting the proffered plan. It was to play the precious value of time on an illusion. What we cannot do ourselves for ourselves, no government can do it for us. The same illusion begged the kings to cure scrofula till Elizabeth refused to do it. Two years were thus lost without reckoning the discouragement.

However, this check from outside gave the next reporter, Gille, the occasion to view the subject on a broader aspect. On one side, the question of uniformity of medicaments must be appreciated by the druggists and pharmaceutists in regard to the purity of the substances, and the reactions of the primary elements; but, on another side, the physicians and physiologists are the judges of the action of the chemical produces, and of the compound preparations from the pharmacy on the living organism. Therefore, Gille resolved to present his work to the next International Medical Congress, where he said—

1876, *September*—"The pharmaceutists have, so far, almost alone prepared the labors which will likely serve as the basis of an international codex. It would, however, be very useful to not engage ourselves much further in a work of this importance without the help of the experience of physicians; for, to deprive ourselves completely of it would expose to severe criticism, and assume a responsibility which physicians can bear better than us. I am, therefore, of the opinion that if an International Commission must be charged with the final redaction of a universal codex, we ought to admit in it some physicians, veterinary surgeons, etc." This was a great step in the right direction; but this reporter did not advance in it alone, as we shall see.

The question of uniformity in medicine had already been the object of individual studies and of collective resolutions in several medical societies. The American physicians had treated of it, and acted upon it several times during the last years:

1873.—Before the New York Medical Journal Association; before the American Medical Association assembled in St. Louis, Mo.; before the British Medical Association, meeting in London; at the Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences, Section of Medicine, meeting in Lyons.*

1874.—Before the American Medical Association, assembled at Detroit, Mich.;† at the British Medical Association, meeting at Norwich; at the Association Française pour l'Avancement des Sciences, meeting at Lille.

1874–75.—Intercurrently, the question of the uniformity of the means of medical practice and observation had been the object of several conferences in Paris, where the Professors Marey, Potain, Lépine, Ball, Brouardel, and Lorain, till his death, showed a great interest and the desire of coöperating in the plan of uniformity, whose *ensemble* and most of the details are entirely of American origin.

1875, *June.*—The American Medical Association, meeting at Louisville, Ky., after hearing the report,‡ and upon the proposition of its General Secretary, W. B. Atkinson, delegated Drs. Adrian and Harwood to the International Medical Congress of Brussels, commissioning them expressly to give the assent of the American profession to the introduction of the French metrical system in physic, and to ask the Congress to take the measures proper to insure uniformity in all that pertains to physic all over the civilized world.

1875, *September* 23.—The memorial of these reporters was read in French by Dr. Collignon. *During the previous day,* Meltanche Sor had opened the Section of Otology by the question, "On the means of measuring audition, and of registering its degrees by a uniform

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* See *Compte rendue*, etc., page 838, etc.
† Transactions, etc., 1874.
‡ Transactions, etc., 1875, page 31.

method in all countries." In the same Section, Sapolini demanded that uniform inquiries be made internationally on the causes and frequency of the surdi-mutity, surdity without mutism, mutism without surdity, and stutterism. *The following day*, in the Section of Ophthalmology, Donders proposed to introduce the metrical measures, instead of the English, French, and Prussian inch, in the measurement of the glasses of spectacles. Javal supported the proposition, the more heartily, since Giraud-Teulon had already graduated his test-glasses accordingly on the metric scale, and Snellen had, too, accommodated his type-letters to the metrical numeration of visual defects.

So the question of the uniformity of instruments, scales, and doses in physics was treated in three Sections of the Congress of Brussels, supported by eminent professors, in its application to distinct specialties, to pharmacy, to otology, and to ophthalmology, and exposed in its generalities by delegates who had expressly come from the United States to urge the adoption by the Congress of this plan of uniformity of language and of action, without which the internationalization of physic will remain a chimera.

Who could believe, if it was not a fact with its dates, that these men of talent or eminence who had come from so far in Belgium to support the same principle—medical uniformity—in several of its special applications, did not try to see and to understand each other; and that, united by the bonds of a common idea, they remained isolated in the bounds of their specialty?

Therefore, these men spoke under the same roof, in adjacent chambers, without communicating with each other, or concerting their efforts; without suspecting that they were giving one of the finest examples of medical anarchy, the best demonstration *per absurdum* of the necessity of uniformizing and of coördinating all the parts of our art, and of internationalizing the whole.

In consequence, the propositions above quoted received the approbation of the members of the Congress, but the Congress, as a body, did not come to any practical conclusion.

1876. *June.*—The American Medical Association meeting in Philadelphia, having heard the reports of Harwood and E. Seguin (see Transactions, etc., 1876);

considering that the theoretical success, and the practical postponement of the execution of the plan of proposed medical uniformity are, one, the proof of its excellence, the other, the demonstration of the force of mind-and-habit prejudices which the projects are meant to conquer, sent this time to you a special delegation composed of the first originator of the plan, and of its last reporter in Brussels. These were expressly charged with the duty of pleading the necessity of uniformity in the means of treatment, of observation and of language, before this assembly, which, at this very moment, must feel the want of such a uniformity, without which international communications remain, to say the least, incomplete.

1876. *September*.—Thus we are here prepared to sum up the idea of which we have just traced the history, as much to encourage those who are apprehensive of novelties, by showing what long roots this one has a ready shot in the muck of physic, as to point out, on the road of those who will follow, the difficulties previously encountered.

It remains now to say a few words of the general bearing of the subject. Of that which distinguishes the American plan of general uniformity from those successively presented in the interest, and for the advancement of special parts of our art; namely, from those of Dumas, Mialhe, Gille, Boudey, Meltanche, Sapolini, Javal, Donders; the adoption of which would improve some parts, but not the whole art.

In contradistinction, the American plan—which is nothing else than the *Numerical Method of Observation*, introduced by Louis forty-four years ago, but rendered more precise and practical by the recent invention of new means and instruments of positive observation—is at once distinguishable by the broadness of its applications to physic; being at the same time a principle and a method. And as nobody can sum up the influence in physics and metaphysics of the Cartesian and Baconian methods, so, and more, would it be futile to pretend to calculate the influence which will obtain on the progress of physic, by a method of observation based on mathematical uniformity; but we can already foresee some of its consequences.

The uniform application of the numerical method will render infinitely more abundant, accessible, readable, comparable, and trustworthy, the observations

on which the leaders support their theories or discoveries, and by which the country-practitioner will connect his mind with the medical movement, and eventually act his part in it. It is so that the records of each will be of service to all. The practice of physic will gain in certainty in several ways. The diagnosis will become more and more precise and mathematical. The course of diseases will be more and more represented in figures, or idealized in graphic traces.

The action of medications on the organism, and the reaction of the functions on the treatment will be registered and reckoned as book-accounts.

Physicians are expected to no more write their prescriptions or borrowed slips of paper without keeping a copy, or on druggists' blank advertisements; neither to record their cases on pocket-books which contain the names of all the saints to be daily invoked to obtain a cure, instead of on books on which can be noted the physiological signs, or aberrations of function, which characterize diseases.

The uniformity of the tables of observation used in private and hospital practice, will furnish the sure elements of a medical statistics, not only in regard to the transitory population of hospitals, but to the families treated at home; it will present for the first time the true and full data for a history of health and disease.

From a different, if not a higher point of view, the mind of physicians will gradually relinquish the process of guessing and believing for the one of trusting their own senses and acting according to their own impressions and counsel. Thus the bulk of our knowledge will steadily be categorized in its natural divisions of savage traditions, barbaric panaceas, priestly impositions, rational systems built on hypothesis, physical and positive acquisitions of experience mathematically coördinated.

In presence of these well-defined series, who will not, with equal eagerness, scorn at the first ones, and try to add a line to the last? When all the physicians will be furnished with uniform means of mathematical certainty all will be enabled to contribute to the general labor; and who can say where our progress of certainty in physics will stop? Physics will be—without any more contest—one of the physical sciences.

But let our first word be the last too; no international onward movement is possible without a mathematical uniformity of plan and of understanding.

Such is the sum of the plan of *uniformity in physic.* Will it be opposed on the plea that its vastness renders it impossible? But it is not only possible, it is commenced. Have we not the Reports of Boulet and Gille, the plan of a universal codex of Mehu, the adhesions of Donders, Javal and others in regard to their specialty; the proposition of Bouchardat to actually commence the *uniformization* of medicaments by the most energetic, which would be like a continuation of the labors of Magendie, in which are found his solution of morphine and other preparations of alkaloids which have become officinal, even international.

The uniformity of nomenclature of remedies and of diseases would follow, since there is no reason why they would not be called by the same name the world over.

A double uniformity in our instruments would follow: one mechanical, by which the parts being made of numbered calibres, could be changed without trouble and hardly any expense. The other, more professional, would consist in a uniformity of all graduated calibres, capacities and scales. To not penetrate too deeply in the future, you can at any time declare it obligatory for family practitioners to keep their private clinical notes like those of the hospitals, and devise a greater and gradual uniformity in the latter.

Thus the International Medical Congress can continue, with a view towards a general end, a work begun by individuals who had only in view the improvement of some special parts of our art.

In consequence of these considerations we reiterate before the International Medical Congress of 1876 the proposition enunciated in 1873, 1874, and 1875, under the patronage of the American Medical Association; and we formally ask you: (1) To recognize in principle the legitimacy and the necessity of uniformity in the practice, in the observations, in the records, and in the medical language of civilized nations. (2) To prepare a plan of uniform hygienic and sanitary measures applicable to the prevention or disappearance of con-

tagious and epidemic diseases. (3) To constitute an International Council, charged with the elaboration of the means of establishing a uniformity of nomenclatures, of officinal formulas, of methods, of instruments, of scales, of mètres and tables of registration for pathological cases and physiological experimentations. (4) Also with power to call in men eminent in the sciences and arts accessory to physic, and the most capable of giving to the labors of the council the most simple and practical direction. (5) To head the list by the names of Bouley, Donders and others already quoted, whose previous labors will have to be taken into serious consideration, and melted, if possible, in the general plan. (6) To give to the council, thus constituted and strengthened, the power and the duty to communicate its report to the next International Medical Congress, which shall meet at Geneva, Switzerland, in September, 1877.

Thus will be rendered possible the continuation of an *œuvre* whose foundation has already occupied thoughtful men during several years—a work which time will achieve, if we diligently labor at it; and which our children will have often to mend, in order to keep it up to the intellectual level of their epoch; since ideas grow, fall, and succeed each other like the leaves of trees. We will have planted the tree, and they will garner the best crops.

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